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ABSTRACT

Certain basic characteristics of a discipline are a particular focus of attention, a unique body of knowledge, and a specific mode of inquiry. Although the field of leisure studies fails to measure up to the standards of a discipline, an interdisciplinary approach can be used to promote integration of knowledge, freedom of inquiry, and intellectual curiosity. The definition of an interdisciplinary approach proceeds in three steps: (1) the exploration and mapping of the minimal conceptual frameworks presupposed by the disciplines involved; (2) the application of different disciplines to particular problems that are considered beyond the proper territory of these disciplines; and (3) the comparison of the utility of the expanded disciplines with respect to problems that could present a common challenge. Problems inherent in interdisciplinary leisure studies are autonomy of established disciplines and administrative competition. To achieve the scope and depth required, the leisure studies field cannot develop without cross borrowing from other disciplines. (CJ)

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LEISURE STUDIES: DISCIPLINE OR PROFESSION

by

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The past ten years have seen the development of Departments of Leisure Studies in certain colleges and universities throughout North America. Additionally, many recreation and parks departments have either changed their name to or attached the term leisure services or studies to their title.

What does this mean? Is leisure the same as recreation? Is there an implied or, more importantly, an explicit difference? The following description is an example of a leisure studies department that was created as a multi-disciplinary curriculum and delineates a course of study that more closely resembles a liberal arts disciplinary effort as opposed to a professional curriculum tract.

The Leisure Studies Department at Salisbury State College was sanctioned by the State Board of Higher Education in Maryland to begin offering a multi-disciplinary curriculum leading to a Bachelor of Arts in Leisure Studies in 1977. The Department was designed as an innovative, multi-disciplinary educational approach which features a core curriculum in leisure studies focusing on such thematic issues as new time bulks, changing values in a changing society, economic considerations of free time, and planning for use of free time and space utilization. In addition to the core of studies in leisure, students must select two collateral areas of study from such disciplines as Art, Biology, Business Administration and Economics, Education, Geography, Music, Philosophy, Physical Education, Psychology and Sociology, thereby constituting a multi-disciplinary curriculum.

There is, of course, a wide diversity in attempts to define or establish criteria for determining what is a discipline. Indeed, it would be folly if a credentials committee attempted to arm itself with absolute criteria and make judgements as to what is or is not an academic discipline. Notwithstanding, there are certain characteristics which may be identified and possible agreement could

be obtained as to what constitutes a discipline. They are; a particular focus of attention, a unique body of knowledge, and a specific mode of inquiry.

Disciplines are usually, in terms of boundaries, indeterminant and in a state of flux. Because of this a particular discipline is better characterized by its focus of attention, its more or less unique "topics" or "common places." Although sometimes broad in scope, disciplines are usually concerned with a singular set or sets of non-trivial phenomena. For example, the physical sciences are concerned with physical reality, or the behavior of inanimate material or matter. Biological sciences are concerned with understanding the nature of living things, of animate materials, while the social sciences are interested in relationships among animate objects. This is an oversimplification, of course, and there can be overlap in each one's attempt to concentrate upon a particular piece of reality. Thus, focus of inquiry or attention is not in itself enough to distinguish one discipline from another.

A set of phenomona must have attracted the attention of a substantial number of investigators who in turn must have generated knowledge unique in substance and of a particular form. The substantiveness of the knowledge stems largely from the focus of inquiry. The form knowledge takes is often said to be of two types: discursive - that is, in the form of systematically arranged linguistic statements such as found in the sciences and non-discursive, or non-linguistic experiences, such as feeling states, visual experiences, intuitions, and emotions such as those associated with the arts. A given discipline will consider its subject matter as being either discursive or non-discursive, that is, capable of linguistic symbols or not. In the final analysis, however, the uniqueness of a body of knowledge comes about through the presence of at least some concepts not found in another body of knowledge. If a field has formulated unique concepts, it follows that their linking together in some logical way will provide unique explanations.

The knowledge generated by a given discipline is, in general, derived from the

use of a particular mode of inquiry or methodology.

Although somewhat oversimplified, there are basically three "ways of knowing:" through empirical operations or the experience of physical or social reality through actual observations employing the senses; through formal operations or the ordering of symbols without recourse to observation of reality, as in mathematics or logic; and through intuition. The established disciplines, at least seen when in the ideal form, have adopted a mode of inquiry corresponding to either empirical, formal or intuitive operations. Although methods and techniques may come and go, a discipline persists in its adherence to its methodology.

Application of these three criteria to the question is there a discipline of leisure studies quite obviously yields an emphatic no! There does not seem to be a particular focus of attention at this time. Can it be claimed that humans, or the human social order, is the subject of study. If that is true where does the field stand in relation to anthropology or sociology? Studies are often reported regarding spatial arrangements or how humans use, or misuse, space. What then is the relationship to geography or psychology? The focus of attention appears ambiguous at best and contradictory in extreme cases.

In asking the question is there a unique body of knowledge represented, the most cursory review of the program of this symposium suggests otherwise. One does not have to employ the shallowness of a Proxmire critique to determine that a sample range of studies from this program could readily be found at any number of social scientific symposia. Consider, for example; "Fear of Crime in Older Persons" - certainly a topic at any gerontological society meeting, "A Preliminary Analysis of a Computer Cartographic Procedure for Planning in the Blue Ridge Parkway" - obviously suitable for presentation at either geography or planning professional meetings, "Quality of Participation in Decision-Making and Organizational, Community and Professional Commitment" - appropriate at any sophisticated management seminar, etc. This listing, of course, is not designed to malign the integrity or import of

any of these papers to be delivered at this symposium. It is simply intended to elucidate the point that leisure reserach is not dealing with a unique body of knowledge. Indeed, the disciplines - not to mention numerous professional and para-professional leanings - of anthropology, sociology, psychology and geography and others have carved niches in their national and regional research programs which identify leisure as a subset of their discipline.

The third criterion is one of a particular mode of inquiry. Again the variety of modes represented at this symposium alone indicates a multiplicity of research endeavors. Multivariate analyses, critical incident techniques, historical investigation of and phenomenological studies in all reveal the wide ranging ways in which essential truths are discovered. Generally a disciplinary effort will obey the mode of inquiry rule. To not do so begs the question of disciplinarity.

Can it be concluded then that leisure studies fails in its attempt to measure up to the standards of a discipline? The answer to that question has to be yes.

What, then, can be claimed? Can there be a claim for interdisciplinarity?

Interdisciplinarity studies, or multidisciplinary, cross-disciplinary, or trans-disciplinary studies are somewhat of a cloth of a different color. Regardlesss of the terminological status and for the sake of brevity and clarity, I will use the term interdisciplinarity to depict the state of the art I am arguing about. Inter-disciplinary approaches to education usually are justified on the basis that they promote integration of knowledge, freedom of inquiry and intellectual curiosity. These three tenets are of the same basic foundation of traditional and contemporary humanistic education. Hence, one might surmise that interdisciplinary education holds the promise of humanism.

The promise, however, is certainly weakened by an objective epistemology presupposed in many contributions to the interdisciplinary movement. In ignoring the educational provess and by limiting itself to objective content, the inter-disciplinary movement subjugates its role through adopting a conventional disciplinary

interpretation of the conception of the world.

Kavaloski suggests, "In this perspective human knowledge is conceived of as being a pre-existing stuff or commodity, so that teachers appear as dispensers and students as passive receptacles of this stuff."[1] In a schema of this sort, the humanistic promise of integration, freedom and creativity is subverted.

Kocklemans indicates the alternative to narrative education in this regard is dialogical education, which he says, "commits itself to relentless self-reflection by both teachers and students as co-inquirers engaged in the ever-unfinished historical task of the humanization of man and his environment.[2]

This is also the issue that Kaplan argued when he discussed some of the parameters of leisure and education with colleagues in the parks and recreation profession.[3]

Broido, on the other hand, is more concerned with the methodology of strict interdisciplinarity.[4] He posits the major difficulty of methods proposed for interdisciplinary efforts consists in their failure to preserve the unique outlook and substantive concern of the disciplines involved. He argues that strict interdisciplinarity must use disciplinary entrenchment even though it is aimed at overcoming it to some degree. Thus it is committed to explaining one disciplinary enterprise from the vantage point of another without destroying its legitimacy. He indicates if such an explanation is possible, even though it employs some strong logical tools, they need not undermine the philosophical presuppositions of the disciplines. For example, they can be used to show that even when one disciplinary enterprise is explicable in terms of the minimal conceptual framework presupposed by another, the original enterprise has significant instrumental advantages in solving particular problems over its alleged explication.

Consequently the basic features of instrumental interdisciplinarity proceed in three steps; the exploration and mapping of the minimal conceptual frameworks presupposed by the disciplines involved, the application of different disciplines

to particular problems that are considered beyond the proper territory of these disciplines, and the instrumental comparison of the utility of egocentrically expanded disciplines with respect to problems that could present a common challenge.

The above point more or less highlights the present state of the art in leisure studies. Kaplan's 1975 work and followed by Cheek-Burch in 1976 have set the embryonic (minimal conceptual frameworks) stage to which the application of different disciplines by leisure studies researchers must either refute, expand or append in their investigative efforts.[5,6]

There are inherent in interdisciplinary studies a number of obstacles. Two factors that immediately cause resistance are; autonomy of established disciplines each with its own identity and integrity, and administrative competition. A host of other socio-political-economic barriers exists and unfortunately time does not permit a full explication of these factors. Please see the current work by Kockelmans for a complete resource guide.[7]

A conclusion to be drawn at this early juncture in the development of leisure studies is that the field cannot develop without the cross borrowing from others. This interdisciplinary borrowing is not a matter of choice, but a necessity to achieve the scope and depth required. The failure of cross or interdisciplinary scientific and educational projects in grappling with urgent practical matters is due to ill-conceived and incorrect applications of these matters. Ineffective application of interdisciplinary borrowing and cross validation of realistic hypothesis and generalizations is to fail to recognize the promise that leisure studies as a interdisciplinary enterprise holds for the future.

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